




**A Civic Engagement Update
for the Pennsylvania Latino Community**

A CONGRESO Bi-Monthly Publication

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November 30, 2006

Dear Fellow Pennsylvanians:

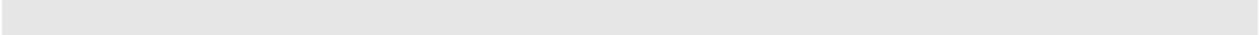
Results from the Mid-term Elections continue to make the headlines in all news media. A few updates are shared in this version of the Congreso Civic Engagement Update. We have prioritized this issue due to the vast changes that will be seen on all levels of government. We highlighted the shift in power in the US House and Senate. This edition, what is most notable is the shift of power in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives.

As of the writing of this update, the Democrats, for the first time in 12 years, have taken control of the House by one Representative who has gained a Democratic seat for Chester County by 23 votes. Another reminder to all of us about the power of our votes. Not only did these 23 votes determine a seat in the Pennsylvania General Assembly, but it also shifted the seats of power in the House of Representatives. This determination means a shift in leadership for all House committees as well.

A shift in power that the Latino community will need to pay attention to, as we call on our legislators to represent the issues that are important to our families, our clients and our community. Congreso will continue to keep you informed on these developments and how we can become more effective advocates to protect and improve the quality of life for all Latinos and all Pennsylvanians in this great state.

Gracias,

Nicholas Torres
President, Congreso de Latinos Unidos



Congreso's update on city, state & federal issues affecting the Latino Community shared with community leaders around PA, staff, and other interested parties.

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Important Dates

- **December 12, 2006 1 - 4pm**

PICC is hosting a training event on *Victims Compensation for Immigrants and Refugees* at CBH, 801 Market Street, 7th flr, Philadelphia. Undocumented Immigrants are eligible for the program. email your name, agency, email address, phone and fax numbers to Michael Reich c-mreich@state.pa.us. The deadline to register is December 4th, 2006.

- **December 12, 2006 3-6pm**

The next *Legal Clinic at the Welcoming Center in Philadelphia*. These clinics are for anyone in the immigrant community who needs to speak to an attorney. The initial consultation at the clinic is free. Additional services for a fee can be negotiated with the attorney. Contact Margaret Hilsdon at margaret@welcomingcenter.org or (215) 557-2859 for more information.

- **December 16, 2006 9:30 – 12 noon**

Congreso is hosting an *Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) Day* for anyone who does not qualify for a Social Security Number, so they can pay taxes. The only document you need is a current passport (or if you don't have one – two of the following are acceptable, if they are current: your country's national ID card, foreign driver's license, civil birth certificate, foreign voter registration card or foreign military registration card).

If you have any other information that would be important for Congreso to include, please email the Director of Civic Engagement, Kristin Shipler, at shiplerk@congreso.net. We want to represent and advocate for all issues affecting Latinos in the SE Pennsylvania area.

Highlight: Electoral Shifts in Power & the Call for Reform

Summary

It sounds like reform and ethics are the name of the game, on all levels of government. **The federal government**, and Speaker-elect Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and our Senator-elect Bob Casey (D-PA), are touting the importance of prioritizing ethical practices and incorporating those practices into federal government. Democrats are also prioritizing fiscal reform, to critically analyze where and how the federal government spends our money.

Another Latino has risen to prominent status in the federal government. **Rep. Silvestre Reyes (D.-TX) was chosen by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to chair the House Intelligence Committee.** In this charge, he will monitor the federal intelligence agencies and the Bush Administration. As a former US Border Patrol official for 26 years, he has pledged to protect civil liberties.

State government is promoting the same, led by Speaker John Perzel (R-Phila) who has recently stated that one of his first tasks in the new legislative year will be to tackle the size of Pennsylvania's General Assembly. Did you know that our state government is the 2nd largest in the country? Imagine the savings that would come from downsizing! As it stands, we have 50 Senators and 203 House Representatives. In contrast, New Jersey has 40 Senators and 80 House Representatives.

Which leads to bigger news. **The Democrats have taken control over the PA State House of Representatives.** As of November 29th, the last pending election in Pennsylvania, in Chester County came to a close, and Democrat Barbara McIlvaine Smith won by only **23 votes**. Remember the importance of your vote. Only 23 votes determined the outcome of an election for State Representative, but more importantly, 23 votes determined which party will run the House of Representatives. The Republican party has five days to contest the results, and they have decided to do so. They realize the importance of retaining power in the House, so they've requested a recount of the vote in Chester County.

Republicans retain power in the State Senate with 29 Republicans and 21 Democrats, and Democratic Governor Rendell has a noted track record of good bipartisan relationships. So it's yet to be told what the new shift in power will mean for the new State Legislature.

In **local government, three new Council members** were sworn into office this week (early because they are replacing three vacant seats.) It's the first time in over a year that the Philadelphia City Council is at full capacity. One of the vacant seats was in Congreso's district. **Dan Savage** will run the 7th Council district seat. A young aspiring politician, Dan is Ward Leader of the 23rd Ward, and his father has been a Ward Leader as well. The seats will be up for grabs again come next spring, when a primary for the seats will be held on May 15, 2007. There are Latino candidates for two of the three seats, so pay attention and determine who you will support.

The Mayor's new ethics panel, which includes Congreso Board Member Rich Negrin, has stated that one of their first priorities will be the 2007 Mayor's race and campaign finance. They will be charged with enforcing rules that cap campaign contributions to \$2,500 per individual and \$10,000 per political committee. Ethics reform will be one of the top platform issues for the Mayoral candidates, so pay attention to how they plan to 'clean-up' city government.

The **Philadelphia Mayoral candidates** are also declaring candidacy in rapid succession. So far, US Rep. Chaka Fattah, City Controller John Sidel, businessman Tom Knox and former City Councilman Michael Nutter have officially declared their candidacies. PA Rep. Dwight Evans will be announcing his candidacy

next week, and it's yet to be determined if US Rep. Bob Brady will do the same. So far, there are no Republican candidates. Remember, this means that the primary on May 15, 2007 may be imperative, as it will determine who the Democratic candidate will be. Will any Republicans end up running? Stay tuned.

For more information about the candidates, see: www.nextmayorproject.org. The Next Mayor Project will be interested in hearing from city Latinos to hear what issues are important to us, and what we want to communicate to the candidates. A couple of the candidates have already reached out to Congreso, knowing that our vote can be a deciding factor for who will run our City. Stay tuned in for more information on this great opportunity!

¿Y Qué?

So what does all of this have to do with the Latino community in Pennsylvania? All politics is local, and as we see local elections occurring in Philadelphia, **the community needs to pay attention**. Philadelphia is the largest city in the state, so the city's politics and how well the city runs at time effects the rest of the state. Additionally, the shift in power in State government will inevitably lead to changes in decisions that are made for our community. **Many anti-immigration pieces of legislation** (e.g., HB1959 English only, HB2670 Employer Penalties, HB2671 Public Benefits) were left pending before the elections. What will happen to those pieces of legislation now? **Anti-violence measures** were introduced in the House of Representatives at the end of September. Will those pieces of legislation be more strongly considered now? Again, **we need to register Latinos to vote, we need to pay attention, and we need to care and advocate for our community**. We need to call on these new legislators to let them know about the issues that affect the community. Make your voice heard!

Congreso's Position

As a non-partisan, community-based organization in the Eastern North Philadelphia community, Congreso de Latinos Unidos has become increasingly involved in strengthening the Latino community through civic engagement and voter participation.

In urban, low income areas, there are historically low rates of civic participation on behalf of community residents, vast language barriers, and situations seen at the polls where voters are influenced and/or intimidated by people who do not have the voters' best interests in mind. As an example of our work, we have coordinated a voter mobilization activity with elderly clients, alongside the City Commissioner's office and the Advancement Project, to reach citizens how to use the voting machines and to know more clearly what their voting rights are as Philadelphia residents. We are supportive of all efforts to make Pennsylvania's polling places more welcoming and supportive of Latino voters. Our goal is to increase involvement on the part of Latino citizens, as Latinos need to make their voices heard; they are traditionally underrepresented in electoral civic participation.

Congreso's Action

- Congreso will continue to register, educate and mobilize voters for the City Council and Mayoral elections. Stay tuned for voter education opportunities. To learn how to register voters in a non-partisan fashion, email Kristin Shipler at shiplerk@congreso.net.
- Congreso's larger term goal is to increasingly weave voter registration, education and mobilization into our programmatic work. When citizens are registered to vote, they are more likely to become civically engaged and will pay more attention to the decisions that are made in their lives on the part of elected officials.

Immigration

On November 9th, Governor Rendell signed a bill into **law making human trafficking a state-level crime.** Pennsylvania enacted this law (in addition to existing federal laws), to strengthen resources to counter trafficking. HB 1112 passed the PA House at the end of 2005, but did not pass the PA Senate until mid October, by a vote of 48-0.

As of the latest posting by the Building Democracy Initiative www.buildingdemocracy.org , **21 out of 52 local anti-immigrant ordinances around the country have sprung in Pennsylvania alone.** Interesting considering that less than 5% of our population is foreign-born.

Education

The Mayor has devoted much attention to the **Philadelphia school system's deficit.** The schools had been asking Mayor Street for \$10M to close their budget gap in the summer. Now at \$73.3M (3% of the school's \$1B+ budget), it's not clear how Mayor Street will fund the 400 additional truancy/parent officers in the schools. CEO Vallas' recommended areas for reduction:

- Administrative Reduction in Force of 20%
 - Reduction in operations and transportation expenses
 - Reduction in contracted services
 - Opportunity for employees with alternative medical coverage to opt-out of District coverage
 - Phase in expansion of alternative schools
 - Closure of EMO and CEO Regional Offices
- Cost Reduction Initiatives **NOT** Recommended
- Reduction of teachers
 - Reduction of Art and Music Programs
 - Reduction of nurses, counselors, psychologists
 - Reduction of librarians
 - Reduction of academic coaches

Congreso spoke at the recent Education Advisory Task Force meeting at the Lighthouse in North Philadelphia, emphasizing the importance of collaboration with community-based organizations, improving truancy efforts and prioritizing the drop-out crisis.

Mayor Street has stepped up efforts to keep children in school. Parents now face fines and jail time if their children consistently remain absent from school.

Economic Self-Sufficiency

Remember – The **State Minimum Wage will increase to \$6.25/hour as of January 1, 2007.** Remember to adjust your budgets AND celebrate the first increase in nine years!

Health

Governor Rendell signed into law this week **protections to victims of child sex abuse.** The Senate unanimously passed SB 1054. The impetus of the law is focused on closing loopholes for reporting abuse and criminalizing the concealing of abuse by an abuser's supervisors. Important legislation for those of us who serve children.

Safety & Violence

Congreso and partner organizations held a **“Know Your Rights” workshop** November 18th, representing our work with the **Latino Juvenile Justice Network** in Philadelphia. The workshop was presented in partnership with the Juvenile Law Center and the Philadelphia Police Advisory Commission. Stay tuned for the next Civic Engagement Update which will focus on statistics that highlight overrepresentation of Latinos in the system and what we can do about it! There is another LJN in Reading, PA. The LJN seeks to identify issues and approaches for juvenile justice reform specific to Latinos. If you are interested in joining either the Philadelphia or the Reading partnerships, contact Kristin Shipler at shiplerk@congreso.net.

The Coalition to End Handgun Violence needs your help! We are seeking those of you, especially advocates outside of Philadelphia, who have new legislators in the State House and Senate to call, write or visit them to ensure they prioritize handgun violence control. See www.vote-smart.org to find out how to contact your new legislator before inauguration. Contact Kristin Shipler at shiplerk@congreso.net to become involved.

Important Links

GOVERNMENT

- US Senator Specter <http://specter.senate.gov/>
- US Senator Santorum <http://santorum.senate.gov/public/>
- US House of Representatives <http://www.house.gov/>
- PA General Assembly <http://www.legis.state.pa.us/index.cfm>
- Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs (GACLA)
<http://www.gacla.state.pa.us/gacla/site/default.asp>
 - November 2006 Edition of Boletín Latino (*highlighting Congreso's Latino Juvenile Justice Network's workshop on November 18th*)
http://www.gacla.state.pa.us/gacla/lib/gacla/boletin_november_2006.pdf
- Philadelphia City Council <http://www.phila.gov/citycouncil/index.html>
- US Citizenship and Immigration Services <http://www.uscis.gov/graphics/index.htm>

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Congreso de Latinos Unidos (Multi-service, social service and civic engagement organization for Latino communities in Philadelphia) www.congreso.net
- National Council of La Raza (Latino advocacy) www.nclr.org
- National Immigration Forum (national immigration issues) <http://www.immigrationforum.org/>
- Pew Hispanic Center (Latino research & statistics) <http://pewhispanic.org/>
- We Are America Alliance (Federal immigration reform) www.wearamericaalliance.org
- Committee of Seventy (Philadelphia-based electoral information) www.seventy.org
- The Next Mayor's Project (informative to learn about the Philadelphia Mayoral candidates and how the public wants them to prioritize the issues!) www.nextmayorproject.org
- The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals) www.cbpp.org
- Pennsylvania Budget & Policy Center (a project focused on state tax, budget, and related policy matters, and effects on working families) <http://www.pennbpc.org/>
- The Children's Advocacy Project of Philadelphia (over 200 resources to help families in need) www.cap4kids.org/philadelphia

Sources:

- Cooper, Regan, PA Immigration & Citizenship Coalition; Immigration Updates, November 2006
- Philadelphia Inquirer; November 17-30, 2006

